A SURVEY OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS WITHIN APPAREL MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN KENYA

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Abstract
There is an emerging research stream among scholars exploring how organizations and countries can cultivate talent so as to enhance innovation, productivity, and competitiveness. In developing countries such as Kenya, and specifically in apparel manufacturing sector, there is a gap on the impact of talent development interventions on operational performance. The objective of this paper is to assess the extent of alignment of investment in talent development interventions and achievement of key performance indicators in the apparel manufacturing industry. The research methodology includes quantitative methods where a questionnaire was used for collection of primary data. Major findings indicate seven of the nine talent development interventions have an impact on operational performance. The study underscores generic approach of developing talent and supports the revised model which is customized to meet the local industry needs.
Keywords: Talent development, Operational performance, Apparel manufacturing, Economic growth.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.24818/beman/2025.15.3-05

1. INTRODUCTION

Talent development has been defined as the act of planning and implementing strategies to grow the organization's talent pool so as to ensure that an organization's supply of talent is adequate to achieve the organization's strategic intent (Garavan, Carbery & Rock (2012). Organizations and governments are now investing in talent development to cultivate talent which is the cornerstone of a competitive and resilient economy. Investing in talent development offers organizations a strategic method for cultivating internal

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growth and enhancing industry-specific and firm-specific knowledge and skills (Rezaei & Beyerlein, 2018). Talent development is viewed as the key to national prosperity in a competitive global economy. This is because it nurtures scientific, technological and innovation ability of individuals (Liu, 2022). Countries have attached value in achieving talent competitiveness. The battle for talent globally is envisioned in all sectors and it is driven by the growing economies. Developing countries are actively participating in the global talent competition with both developed and emerging economies. This is because of the demand for a skilled and talented workforce as multinational corporations expand their operations. The talented workforce is a resource to enhance their competitiveness, drive innovation, and stimulate economic growth. Hence, talent competitiveness, which is a country's ability to implement policies and practices that effectively attract and develop human capital, has become an important priority area. As a result, it is important for countries to benchmark their initiatives and outcomes which encompass talent management and talent competitiveness within varied socio-economic environments (INSEAD, 2023).

1.1 Lessons learned: leveraging talent systems

The focus on cultivating high-quality talent for industrial development is an emerging research stream that explores a new approach to developing a talented workforce. A comparative analysis of talent development at the national level shows that in Japan, national talent strategy involves cultivating domestic talent and this has proven to be the major driver of industrial development (Shin & Gordon, 2024). A talented workforce of engineers with the capability to adapt and integrate foreign technologies as well as the skilled workers who have the capability to implement these technologies into the manufacturing process have steered the Japanese economy to growth (Shin & Gordon, 2024). Singapore places significant emphasis on talent development and has established a comprehensive talent policy system. Singapore's rapid economic growth is considered a development miracle and the main focus for industrial development is innovation-driven based on strategy of talent (Liu, 2022). The talent policy is adjusted to the demands of the industrial transformation phases. Singapore's policies on training and attracting scientific and technological innovation talents is a good example for developing countries. The government in Singapore is the main planner and implementer of talent strategy which is integrated into the national strategic system (Liu, 2022). The mechanism for managing talent work is made up of four main HR departments responsible for human resources planning, formulation of national human capital strategy and plan, coordination of government departments on talent-related affairs and study of social and talent-related issues. These four departments form an orderly human resources government management system, and it ensures steady development of talent work (Liu, 2022). Wang & Sun (2018) enlighten on the policy initiatives on talent in China which involves launch of the National Medium and Long-term Talent Development Plan (2010-2020). This comprehensive plan in China aims at creating a skilled workforce

within ten years (Wang & Sun, 2018). This plan is comprised of national policies for developing the overall workforce in China, as well as policies that tackle industry-specific talent development needs. The lesson from Asian countries is that leveraging talent has enabled the countries to shift from manufacturing to exporting high-value financial and technical services (Ulrich & Allen, 2014). Wang (2024) analysis of talent status in construction industry in Chain reveals that there are gaps in talent structure and industry demands. As the traditional cultivation models are insufficient in meeting the industry's evolving needs, an innovative talent training model is proposed that is comprised of a knowledge model, capability module and quality module (Wang, 2024). This model enables practitioners to master knowledge in key areas such as architectural design, and it focuses on key skills such as engineering skills while simultaneously cultivating moral character and strong scientific foundation (Wang, 2024).

This new perspective of talent development research accounts for national context, and needs for industrial and economic development. The new approach to talent development departs from predominantly Western versions of talent development models (Oppong & Gold, 2016). This new wave of research is of importance to African economies following increased investment and trade between African and Asian countries such as China as it provides insight on how to develop a skilled labor force (Bashir, 2015).

1.2 Talent development interventions

Research themes focusing on talent development interventions at the organization level explore key indicators for measuring talent development potential such as talent innovativeness, talent mobility, talent quality and propose systematic approaches for building talent that encompasses organizational goals, culture and effective learning models (Tiwari, Mishra & Thakur, 2022). Tiwari et al. (2022) explores talent development models that improve structural alignment by enhancing interorganizational partnerships. Fang (2020) study explores capabilities of university-enterprise collaboration in cultivating apparel design talents to meet the demands for intelligent manufacturing and personalized customization in apparel industry. The proposed training model consists of a curriculum that is grounded on strong theoretical knowledge and apparel design competitions (Fang, 2020).

Rezaei & Beyerlein (2018) categorize talent development interventions into five groups based on McLean's (2006) organizational development (OD) framework. This classification is comprised of formal training and development programs as well as organization development interventions implemented at the team, individual, organization and global level. The team-level OD interventions aim at improving collaboration within the team. The individual-level OD interventions aim at providing an individual with new perspectives to career advancement. The organizational-level OD interventions aim at creating changes organization-wide while the global-level OD interventions aim at training the workforce so that the organization can effectively

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meet conditions of global environment. The formal training and development programs include programs such as in-house seminars, executive MBA programs, collaboration with external sources of knowledge such as universities, company training and development programs, and off-the-job training (Rezaei & Beyerlein, 2018). Garavan et al. (2012) classification consists of four groups, namely relationship-based talent development, formal talent development, job-based talent development and informal development programs. The relationship-based talent development programs emphasize on relationship-building approach of developing high potential talent through coaching, mentoring, providing career advice and sponsorship. Using the job as a basis for development involves engaging talent by increasing job scope through job rotation, transfers, and encouraging participation in self-development activities as well as managerial and leadership opportunities so as to expand their horizons (Garavan et al., 2012).

1.3 Theoretical framework underpinning study

Scholars contend that the theoretical perspective of current organizational practices on talent development is not sufficiently mapped, as the empirical research has not resulted in the development of theoretical frameworks for talent development (Dalal & Akdere, 2018). The lack of a distinct theoretical framework of concepts on talent management and development is partly attributed to the fact that the facets of talent development cannot be explained by one single theoretical framework. Majority of studies have examined talent development through the lens of resource-based view because the talented workforce is a valuable and rare resource, and they enable an organization to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Tetik, 2016). Every organization needs to have a strong talent pool as their unique skills drive competitiveness (Yogalakshmi & Supriya, 2020). The resource-based theory provides rationale for investing in talent development programs because the talented workforce is creative and capable of innovating thus enabling the organization to participate in the product-market strategy more efficiently and effectively (Brahma & Chakraborty, 2011). The institutional theory has also shown to have substantial explanatory power by providing insights on the aspects that influence organization actors' decisions on talent development, namely routine practices, logic, interests, preferences, motives, stakes, historical paths, pressures and cultural borderlines. However, this theoretical framework is limited in explaining dynamics of return on investment in talent development or explaining impact of contextual factors on design of a talent development program. Based on the need to refine theories underpinning implementation of talent development, this paper draws on literature on human resource management and investigates the prevailing universalistic and contingency perspectives on impact of talent development interventions.

Human Resource Management (HRM) is often viewed from a universal and contextual perspective. The universal approach suggests that certain HRM practices are beneficial across all organizations, regardless of their size, industry, or culture. The universalistic argument is however, limited as it does not place much

importance to the national and institutional contexts (Harney, 2023). Conversely, the contextual approach emphasizes that HRM practices should be customized to the firm-specific needs and characteristics. The study aims at closing research gaps by exploring arguments embedded in contextual approach to human resource management. The paper examined the contingency approach to human resource management which suggests that the effectiveness of HRM practices is not universal but rather depends on the specific context of the organization.

The study tests the following hypotheses:

Ho1: The relationship between universal (generic) talent development models and performance is not statistically significant.

Ho2: The relationship between nonuniversal talent development models and performance is not statistically significant.

2. METHODS

Research design: Quantitative research methods involved conducting a survey, collecting data to quantify opinions and conducting statistical analysis of the data.

Location

- Pilot study: This was conducted in 7 textile and apparel companies located outside the Export Processing Zones. The companies were located in Kiambu, Laikipia, Nairobi, Nakuru, Uasin Gishu counties in Kenya.
- Actual study: This was conducted in 17 apparel manufacturing companies located in Export Processing Zones in Kilifi, Kisumu, Machakos, Mombasa and Nairobi counties in Kenya.

Population: The target population was drawn from the EPZA annual performance report which indicated that in 2022, there were 36 garment enterprises in EPZ with 66,260 employees (EPZA Kenya, 2023).

Sampling techniques: The enterprises were sampled using convenience sampling techniques and multi-stage sampling techniques as this was suitable for the large geographically dispersed populations.

Procedures: The unit of analysis was defined as the organizations from which generalization and conclusions were formed and developed while the unit of observation were the HR personnel, engineers and managers as they were knowledgeable about talent development programs in place. Survey administration procedures included in-person administration and drop-off and pick-up methods.

Instrument and tools: A structured survey was conducted using a talent development questionnaire which had 90 items based on five-point Likert scale. A questionnaire on operational performance consisting of 30 items was also administered.

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Data analysis techniques: Statistical analysis such as regression analysis, correlational analysis, mean, standard deviation were performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

TABLE 1. RELIABILITY OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Statistics	No. of items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Coaching	.933	10	42.33	6.929
Mentoring	.899	10	44.64	4.419
Sponsorship	.918	10	35.96	8.923
Feedback	.928	10	41.36	7.725
Technical	.848	10	42.69	5.909
Management Development	.939	10	35.01	10.706
Work-based	.882	10	40.44	7.632
Job-Rotation	.958	10	42.30	9.214
Developmental activities	.858	10	41.54	6.768

Source: Field survey, 2022-2024

TABLE 2. SAMPLE STATISTICS OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT MODEL

	Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Talent development	4.03	.634	.288	.031
Organization Performance	3.77	.448		

Source: Field survey, 2022- 2024

The correlational analysis shows that the correlation coefficient of talent development and performance (r = 0.288, p-value = 0.031 <0.05) is significant. However, hypothesis testing shows that the t-statistic falls within the acceptable region | t | < | c | 2.010891 <2.017. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted that the relationship of universal (generic) talent development model and performance is not statistically significant.

TABLE 3. MODEL FIT OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT

	Model Summary			
Influencing variables	R	R^2	Adjusted R	SE of the Estimate
Talent Development, Operational performance	.288	.083	.061	.435

Source: Field Survey, 2022- 2024

The coefficient of determination (R2 = .083) shows that talent development model accounts for 8.3% of variability in operation performance.

TABLE 4. ANOVA OUTPUT OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT MODEL

	ANOVA				
Indicator	SS	df	MS	F-value	Sig. (P-value)
Regression	.701	1	.701	3.709	.061
Residual	7.745	41	.189		
Total	8.445	42			

Source: Field survey, 2022- 2024

The ANOVA output indicates a non-significant model based on the large p-value (p-value =.061 >0.05). This is an indication that the universal talent development model does not significantly predict the operational performance.

TABLE 5. REGRESSION-BASED MODEL OF UNIVERSAL TALENT DEVELOPMENT

	Coefficients				
Influencing variables	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.953	.432		6.839	.000
Talent Development	.204	.106	.288	1.926	.061

Source: Field survey, 2022-2024

The regression coefficients of the linear regression (B = .204, t=1.926, p-value = .061 >.05) show that the effect size is small. The implication of this finding is that increasing investment in this talent development model could lead to a non-significant impact on operational performance.

A nonuniversal talent development model was derived by using 7 out of the 9 talent development interventions which had a factor loading above 0.8. The selected talent development variables include mentoring, work-based experiences, development activities, management development, coaching and sponsorship.

The analysis of the second hypothesis tests is presented below:

TABLE 6. MODEL SUMMARY

	Model Fit				
Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE	Durbin-Watson
1	.663	.439	.334	.369	1.696

Source: Field Survey, 2022-2024

The coefficient of determination (R2 =.439) indicates that these variables explain 43.9% of the variability in operational performance. In addition, the correlation coefficient of these selected variables with operational performance is positively strong (r=.663) and the correlational hypothesis tests confirmed that the t-statistic falls outside the acceptable region | t | c | 5.3870792 > 2.02) at 95% confidence interval level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is supported by the results which show that the relationship of nonuniversal talent development model and performance is statistically significant.

TABLE 7. ANOVA OUTPUT

	ANOVA OUTPUT				
Indicator	SS	df	MS	F-value	Sig. (P-value)
Regression	3.421	6	.570	4.178	.003
Residual	4.367	32	.136		
Total	7.788	38			

Source: Field Survey, 2022- 2024

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TABLE 8. COEFFICIENTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient			Collinearity Statistics	
Influencing variables	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	2.054	.695		2.956	.006		
Mentoring	0.015	.283	.015	.052	.958	.225	4.448
Work-based experiences	.057	.155	.096	.366	.717	.257	3.894
Developmental activities	-0.061	.145	-0.091	-0.421	.677	.375	2.667
Management Development	-0.172	.092	-.399	-1.872	.070	.386	2.589
Coaching	.439	.160	.673	2.746	.010	.292	3.425
Mentoring	.114	.115	.205	.991	.329	.411	2.435

Source: Field survey, 2022- 2024

The regression equation for the nonuniversal model is:

Y = 2.054 + (0.15) mentoring + (.366) work-based experiences – (.061) developmental activities – (.172) + (4.39) coaching + (.114) sponsorship (1)

The talent development model was modified by removing variables that proved to be a weak link. These findings are consistent with study by Panda & Sahoo (2015) which found that 6 out of the 23 talent development interventions influence development process in the manufacturing factories in India. Panda & Sahoo (2015) assessed the impact of talent development interventions including career development prospects, knowledge sharing, performance appraisals, creativity and innovation on organizational success. Collaborative knowledge sharing on performance had the highest mean, while sponsorship for career development had the lowest mean (Panda & Sahoo, 2015).

4. CONCLUSION

The talent development model was modified by customizing the talent development interventions to the context of the industry. The findings established the predictive validity of the nonuniversal talent development model and the viability of the contingency approach to human resource management. The theoretical arguments of the contingency approach to human resource management are supported as they emphasize the need for achieving the best fit between the human resource management strategies and the organizational and business strategies (Opara & Waheduzzaman, 2024).

The managerial implication of this findings is that there is no one-size fits all strategy as a human resource practice may be suitable in a certain context or organization and not in another (Opara & Waheduzzaman, 2024). In order to achieve talent optimization and improve operational competitiveness of the apparel manufacturing companies in developing countries, standardizing HR practices across the organization is not a competitive strategy. Instead, the HR practices and talent development interventions should be tailored to specific business needs as this leads to better alignment. Organizations can design an appropriate talent development model by utilizing a range of formal training and development interventions

that have an impact at the global, organizational, team and individual level. An organization aiming to invest in a targeted approach of developing a talented workforce that can meet industry requirements should aim at aligning the programs with performance data and performance targets in the industry.

At the national level, future research should be broadened to include cross-country analysis so as to benchmark the effectiveness of talent development model in enhancing talent competitiveness. In addition, future research should explore capabilities of adopting a performance-driven development model that aligns the talent development interventions with actual performance data.

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